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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/31/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [BY](#) [FR](#)  
SUBJECT: FRANCE/BURUNDI: AMBASSADOR MOLLER'S AUGUST 22  
CONSULTATIONS

REF: A. BUJUMBURA 726  
[1](#)B. STATE 139995

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, 1.5 (b/d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: French MFA and MOD officials expressed views on Burundi and the Great Lakes region similar to those of the U.S. during August 22 discussions with visiting U.S. Ambassador to Burundi Patricia Moller. MFA officials expressed concern about the recent arrests in Burundi in connection with alleged coup plotting and reviewed French assistance programs, centered on education, refugee support, public financing, general "capacity building," and limited police and military training. These paralleled similar programs in other Great Lakes countries. The MFA officials stressed the need to keep Burundi moving in a positive direction and, thereby, serving as a positive example of a country emerging from a long and destructive period of ethnic warfare. Both sides agreed on the relative lack of sophistication of Burundi's leaders and its need to cultivate a more positive international image and build donor confidence. FM Batumubwira seemed to be more perceptive than other leaders but her ability to get things done was uncertain. The French agreed with Ambassador Moller on the importance of the Tripartite Plus and other regional approaches. The MOD military advisor for Africa and the Middle East offered a terse description of France's interests in Burundi and the region. He tended to minimize France's interests and its ability, given other demands and limited resources, to influence events there. He stressed the need for greater involvement in the region on the part of the international community. All of Ambassador Moller's interlocutors cited good U.S.-France cooperation on Burundi and the region, and stressed their commitment to continue working with us to achieve our common goals. END SUMMARY.

Meeting at MFA

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[1](#)2. (C) THE "COUP": MFA AF PDAS-equivalent Elisabeth Barbier (expected soon to become Ambassador to Kenya) and Burundi desk officer Laurent Chevallier met with Ambassador to Burundi Patricia Moller on August 22. Barbier immediately expressed concern about the situation in Burundi following the recent series of arrests in connection with an alleged coup plot. She was keenly interested in Ambassador Moller's assessment. Ambassador Moller reviewed recent events and noted clear signs that those arrested had been mistreated, if not tortured. Barbier confirmed reports that former President Ndayizeye remained in confinement. Ambassador Moller said that she and other ambassadors had expressed in a direct manner their concerns about the arrests to FM Batumubwira.

13. (C) LEADERSHIP ISSUES: Ambassador Moller said that FM Batumubwira was one of Burundi's leaders capable of seeing the "big picture" and of understanding how the international community's perception of Burundi affected relations. Other GOB leaders lacked sophistication and experience, many having been far from the centers of power before assuming control a year previously. Barbier and Ambassador Moller discussed the many uncertainties about the arrests and the GOB's claims of having evidence of a coup plot but its failure to display such evidence.

14. (C) RESPONSES TO THE "COUP": Barbier and Ambassador Moller noted the absence of any apparent links between the arrestees, making a coup plot less plausible. The Burundian army had not, so far, taken any action. Barbier expressed disappointment in President Nkurunziza's August 17 speech (ref A) and his failure to take decisive measures, although she agreed that addressing the issue publicly was a good step. Ambassador Moller described her exchange with FM Batumubwira and different perceptions in Burundi and the U.S. on presidential speeches during a crisis -- obligatory in the U.S. but a possible sign of weakness in Burundi.

15. (C) DONORS CONFERENCE/FRENCH PROGRAMS: Concerning the Burundi donors conference scheduled for the autumn, Ambassador Moller and Barbier discussed Burundi's often naive concept of international assistance and the expectation that simply holding a conference would generate new assistance. Barbier said that France was trying to orient its assistance programs to meet Burundi's priorities, with the education sector an object of French support. France was also helping with police training (which Ambassador Moller welcomed). Other areas for assistance included refugee support, public financing, and "capacity building." These were French

priorities for other countries in the Great Lakes region. The political and security background in Burundi would be important for donors -- unrest and signs of instability would scare off donors. Ambassador Moller reiterated Burundians' failure to appreciate the importance of projecting a positive image internationally and the sometimes differing responses one received from different GOB ministries.

16. (C) Chevallier noted with dismay that some Burundians viewed foreign assistance as a form of reparations from the colonial era and not a resource to be carefully invested for Burundi's future. He stressed the importance of making clear to the GOB that donors would expect improvement in such areas as human rights and good governance. The question of demobilized FNL members after the signing of an accord was also complex and potentially costly, and determining the FNL's intentions was always difficult.

17. (C) POLITICS: Barbier said that FM Batumubwira seemed aware of Burundi's image problems and asked whether the FM could do anything about them. Ambassador Moller said that that was a key question that remained to be determined. Deskoff Chevallier noted that the present coalition led to a lack of cohesion within the GOB. Ambassador Moller pointed out President Nkurunziza's high popularity in contrast with his relatively weak leadership. Barbier was concerned about postponement of the GOB-FNL summit, which would be an opportunity to bring key actors together and to push President Nkurunziza in the right direction. She hoped the summit would take place. Ambassador Moller lauded South Africa's and Tanzania's policies towards Burundi. Barbier and Ambassador Moller agreed that France, the U.S., and like-minded countries were sending similar signals concerning Burundi.

18. (C) ONUB: Both Ambassador Moller and Barbier expressed uncertainty about ONUB's fate following the UNSYG's recommendation that it be downsized (ref B), and to what extent it might continue playing a positive role politically and economically should its mandate continue. Ambassador Moller noted that the downsizing was in part a result of a Burundian request. It was not clear whether Burundi had

taken into account the strong contribution to the local economy ONUB's personnel had been making. Another uncertainty centered on how Burundi would handle truth-and-reconciliation issues. On the positive side, Ambassador noted that the Burundian press was much freer than its counterpart in Rwanda and had done a good job covering the recent arrests. Chevallier cited another positive -- the recent "coup" arrests remained a political issue only and had fortunately not acquired an ethnic dimension.

¶9. (C) A GOOD EXAMPLE: Barbier said that Burundi so far represented a good example of a country lifting itself out of prolonged ethnic turmoil, with all its complications. France wanted it to continue moving in a positive direction and to serve as an example, particularly to the DRC. Rwanda was not serving as such a model politically, she said. She agreed that Rwanda was enjoying relative economic success. The international community needed to keep steering Burundi in the right direction. Barbier hoped that donors had not been negatively affected by the arrests and subsequent controversy. She agreed with Ambassador Moller that Burundi's ambitious social programs (health care, education) would be expensive, and a failure in these areas could produce serious problems. The issue of the sale of the presidential aircraft was not helping.

¶10. (C) TRIPARTITE PLUS: Barbier and Ambassador Moller agreed on the value of the Tripartite Plus process, which had been useful for all parties involved to address common problems such as insurgencies. Chevallier commented on the importance France placed on stability in the DRC and how French regional efforts always took into account the DRC. Ambassador Moller reported good cooperation among Tripartite Plus ambassadors in Bujumbura and her good working relationship with France's ambassador. She described USG assistance programs following the lifting of 508 sanctions in December 2005. Various IMET programs were in train and the U.S. had helped organize a civil-military seminar and similar meeting that had been well received.

¶11. (C) The meeting closed with a commitment by both sides to continue existing U.S.-France cooperation in Burundi in an effort to achieve the many goals the U.S. and France shared.

Meeting at MOD  
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¶12. (C) Colonel Eric Bonnemaïson, the MOD's military advisor for Africa and the Middle East, met with Ambassador Moller prior to her meeting at the MFA. (COMMENT: Bonnemaïson tended to view Burundi from a narrow military perspective and he did not address many of the concerns Barbier raised. END COMMENT.) He said that one of the biggest security challenges in the region was the difficulty in controlling borders, which insurgent groups exploited. He suggested the need for a regional approach because individual countries could not solve border control issues individually.

¶13. (C) MODEST INTERESTS: In Bonnemaïson's view, France's interests in Burundi were relatively few. Economic interests were limited and the Francophonie movement, while important, did not, in his view, warrant major French involvement. Most interventions in the region were for humanitarian purposes. He noted France's involvement in Rwanda during the 1990s and continuing problems stemming from France's performance during the 1994 Rwandan genocide and questions surrounding Operation Turquoise. This difficult era and continuing judicial and public inquiries concerning France and the genocide, he suggested, were inhibiting France-Rwanda military cooperation.

¶14. (C) DRC: When asked, Bonnemaïson said that the DRC posed many challenges. It was a large country and difficult to govern. One objective was simply to avoid having it collapse. He believed it necessary to involve a range of other countries, suggesting that France's ability to shoulder the costs of supporting stability in the DRC were beyond its means. However, aside from the U.S., UK, and France, there was not much interest among others in the DRC, especially

with other crises in Africa demanding attention. Migration (legal and illegal) from Africa was one concern of Europe's Mediterranean states.

¶15. (C) CHINA: Concerning China's increased influence in Africa, Bonnemaïson said that China could play a helpful role, but had chosen not to do so. The Chinese did not share our concerns regarding democracy, transparency, and the rule of law. Ambassador Moller noted China's activism in Burundi and PRC programs to build roads, schools, and water-related facilities. Bonnemaïson said that the MOD estimated 500,000-750,000 Chinese in Africa; he expected China to continue its "invasion" of Africa. He said that Chad's dropping of Taiwan and establishing relations did not surprise him.

¶16. (C) FRENCH MILITARY IN AFRICA: Asked about the restructuring of French military headquarters in Africa, Bonnemaïson said that the purpose was to give a more regional focus to them, and to align them in ways that would parallel Africa's several sub-regional multilateral organizations. This would not come, he said, at the expense of France's existing bilateral military relations. Bonnemaïson explained military training programs offered to Rwanda and Burundi, including the "maison metier" program, which he described as a program to offer broad-based basic skills training to the military in Burundi. (COMMENT: Barbier suggested that the "maison metier" program had recently ended but similar forms of cooperation were either in progress or under consideration. END COMMENT.) Ambassador Moller described the ending of the 508 sanctions in December 2005 and U.S. programs initiated since then. Bonnemaïson encouraged cooperation between the French and U.S. embassies in Burundi, and with France's defense attache, resident in Rwanda.

¶17. (U) Ambassador Moller authorized transmission of this message.

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